

Pickling At The Quarry

Pickling for taste and preserving is easy and fun, and very useful at higher altitudes. Paul Cosgrave visited The Quarry Organic Garden for some tips.

Deb Hurley, Caroline Nelson and Ben Cameron started The Quarry as a non-profit 'hobby farm'. It's not strictly speaking a community garden but it works on the same principles of place, community and sustainability. Open to the public twice weekly, The Quarry has evolved into a reliable local source of seeds, advice and produce.

"We've been going for eighteen months, improving the soil as we go", Deb told me. Soil quality is everything and being a quarry there was no real soil at all at first. "But Ben's the compost king and he collects heaps of green waste like lawn clippings and cuttings", Caroline said. "People donate animal manures and it all goes into the mix to build up great soil". Caroline's husband, Romeijn, an artist and carpenter, has done some creative additions with a shipping container and fallen timbers from the July storms.

When they say non-profit, they mean it. Their prices are amazingly cheap and they'll talk for free. The Quarry's seedlings are all seasonal, so you can be sure they'll grow locally. Deb and Caroline both have permaculture backgrounds and they're introducing lesser known plants like Japanese Daikon and Kale, which Peter Cundle lists as a highly nutritious vegetable.

Mountain gardeners find commercial hybridized seeds can be problematic in the cooler climate and enthusiasm for 'real seeds' is high here. "Ours are heritage seeds, from our own plants or high quality providers", says Deb. They specialize in cool climate seeds. "We consider The Quarry to be a hobby enterprise but we also feel the time has come to start thinking seriously about food security", she went on. "And it's also a way of supporting the upper mountains community. People can just come and have a look, get advice on composting, sustainable practice and growing from seed, then get started with seedlings that will really grow". And pick up some delicious locally grown and pickled produce.

**"... Amy Schauer's books
are my inspiration ..."**

How To

Pickling is remarkably easy and like many people here I began with all the green tomatoes left over at the end of the season. Caroline started about thirty years ago in Tasmania. "I've tried to focus on older recipes and Amy Schauer's books have been my real inspiration. Sometimes I'll add my own herbs and spices. The main thing to remember is that different vegetables need different vinegars". Cider and plain white are amongst the best, she says. "It's a wonderful way to use surplus produce and get through those times when we don't have many things growing".

Caroline Nelson's Pickled Carrot Sticks

450g carrots; 1¼ cup water; 1 cup cider vinegar; ¼ cup sugar; 2 lightly crushed garlic cloves; 1½ t fennel, dill or anise seeds; 1½ T coarse salt; 2 bay leaves.

Cut the carrots into sticks, boil the lightly salted water. Drop the carrots in and simmer (1 minute only). Pour into a colander, rinse under cold water, drain thoroughly. While

they're draining heat the remaining ingredients, simmer for 2 minutes, remove from heat. Place carrot sticks into jars, cover with liquid and seal/sterilize. Open with your favourite bread and cheese.

"Pumpkin and zucchini also work well", says Caroline. But why pickle? What's the bottom line? "It's nourishing, it's nurturing, it's fun, it tastes great! People are much more aware now that eating seasonally and locally is simply far healthier". And it offers hope in uncertain times, adds Deb.

Tomato Pickle

3kg green tomatoes; 750 ml white vinegar; 1kg onions; small handful salt; ½ t pepper; 1kg sugar; 3T good quality curry powder; 3T mustard powder.

Chop onions and tomatoes, sprinkle with salt, mix well in a bowl, stand overnight. Drain off the fluid. Add three quarters of the vinegar, bring to the boil, boil for 10 minutes. Add the sugar, return to the boil, stirring, and boil for 1 hour, stirring often. Mix the mustard, curry powder and pepper into the remaining vinegar and stir well. Add to the pot and stir until fully combined. Boil for 10 minutes, bottle and seal.

Sterilizing & Sealing

To vacuum seal, warm your jars and fill with boiling water, standing them with lids in the boiling water. Fill with mixture to the brim, put the lid on tightly, turn upside down and cool naturally. The mixture should stay uncontaminated for up to two years; refrigerate once opened and consume fairly quickly.

Food In Brief

Slow Food proceedings continue through spring with a range of "Chook Fest" events, a Community Christmas Picnic and the Blue Nose Wine Dinner (what's on, p12-15; sfbm.com.au). The latest edition of the Hawkesbury Harvest Farm Gate Trail, promoting a country experience on Sydney's doorstep, has been launched in Bilpin with the ABC's Simon Marnie, Louise Markus MP and local producers attending.

images photoswordspeople.com; **thanks** deb hurley, caroline nelson (the quarry, connaught rd, blackheath, opens tues & sat mornings; produce also at blackheath community market); **podcast** bluemountainswonderland.com.au; **more** amy schauer (1871-1956) adb.anu.edu.au/biography/schauer-amy-8353; sfbm.com.au.